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**CHECKLIST & TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**APPLICANT:** Town of Berlin

**NAME OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY:** Town of Berlin

**Please review the checklist of attachments and furnish all of the attachments that are applicable. Contents of the notebook should be tabbed and organized as follows:**

- ☐ **TAB #1     Applicant Information**
- ☐ **TAB #2     Sustainable Community Baseline Information - In addition to hard copies of the project location map, a detailed listing of parcels (i.e. Parcel ID Numbers) that form the project boundary should be included. Maps should also be submitted in electronic GIS form (shape file). If you have additional comments or questions, please contact Brad Wolters, Senior GIS Specialist, DHCD, wolters@mdhousing.org.**
- ☐ **TAB #3     Local Capacity to Implement Plans & Projects: Attach Sustainable Communities Workgroup roster noted in Section III**
- ☐ **TAB #4     Sustainable Community Plan**
- ☐ **TAB #5     Progress Measures**
- ☐ **TAB #6     Local Support Resolution**
- ☐ **TAB #7     Signed Sustainable Community Application Disclosure Authorization and Certification**

**All documents on this checklist are mandatory.  
Failure to provide the requested document will automatically deny your application.**

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**I. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY APPLICANT INFORMATION****Name of Sustainable Community:** Town of Berlin

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**Legal Name of Applicant:** Town of Berlin

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**Federal Identification Number:** 52-6000776

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**Street Address:** 10 William Street

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<b>City:</b> Berlin	<b>County:</b> Worcester	<b>State:</b> MD	<b>Zip Code:</b> 21811
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<b>Phone No:</b> (410) 641-2770	<b>Fax:</b> (410) 641-2316	<b>Web Address:</b> www.berlinmd.gov
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**Sustainable Community Contact For Application Status:**

<b>Name:</b> Michael Day	<b>Title:</b> Director of Economic Developm
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<b>Address:</b> 10 William Street	<b>City:</b> Berlin	<b>State:</b> MD	<b>Zip Code:</b> 21811
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<b>Phone No:</b> 443-735-0957 x	<b>Fax:</b> 410-641-2316	<b>E-mail:</b> michaelday@berlinmdarts.org
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**Person to be contacted for Award notification:**

<b>Name:</b> William G. "Gee" Williams	<b>Title:</b> Mayor
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<b>Address:</b> 10 William Street	<b>City:</b> Berlin	<b>State:</b> MD	<b>Zip Code:</b> 21811
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<b>Phone No:</b> 410-641-3858 x	<b>Fax:</b> 410-641-2316	<b>E-mail:</b> mayor@berlinmd.gov
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## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

Through this section, applicants will demonstrate that trends and conditions in homeownership, property values, employment, commercial and residential vacancy, community facilities and infrastructure, natural resources, the local business and residential districts show a need for new or continued revitalization reinvestment. Demographic data and trends provided by Applicants should support the choice of the proposed Sustainable Community Area boundary and help form a basis for needs and opportunities to be addressed through the initiatives and projects described in the Sustainable Community Action Plan (Section IV).

POINTS IN THIS SECTION WILL BE AWARDED BASED ON THE SC AREA'S NEED FOR REINVESTMENT AS EVIDENCED BY THOROUGH DESCRIPTIONS OF CURRENT CONDITIONS OR TRENDS (and will not be based upon current or planned revitalization activities which will be covered in Section IV).

### **A. Proposed Sustainable Community Area (s):**

**County:** Worcester

**Name of Sustainable Community:** Town of Berlin

**Include boundary descriptions and a map of the Sustainable Community. In addition to hard copies of the of the project location map, a detailed listing of parcels (i.e. Parcel ID Numbers) that form the project boundary should be included. If possible, maps should also be submitted in electronic GIS form (shape file). If you have additional comments or questions, please contact Brad Wolters, Senior GIS Specialist, DHCD, [Wolters@MdHousing.org](mailto:Wolters@MdHousing.org)**

The SC area includes the whole Town of Berlin. We are seeking to designate the entire town. This is being done due to the small size of the town and the common situation across our entire municipality. No one area in and of itself seems to be a logical fit for SC.

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**II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

Approximate number of acres within the SC Area: 1930

Existing federal, state or local designations (check all that apply):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Legacy Area   | <input type="checkbox"/> Designated Neighborhood                                  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Main Street             | <input type="checkbox"/> Maple Street   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Historic District | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National Register Historic District           |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A & E District          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State Enterprise Zone Special Taxing District |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BRAC                               | <input type="checkbox"/> State Designated TOD                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other(s): _____                    |   |

## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

### **Prior Revitalization Investments & Smart Growth:**

**(a) List and describe any significant State and local smart growth or revitalization related program investments (for instance, Community Legacy or SC Rehab Tax Credit) that have been invested in the Area since the launching of Maryland's Smart Growth initiative and programs in 1997 (including Housing investment). What impact have these investments made in the community? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The Town has been awarded \$1,954,772.00 in CDBG funds over the history of the program.

CDBG funds were recently used to construct sidewalks along Flower Street and the east side of Berlin. CDBG funds have also been used for a downtown revitalization planning and feasibility study, extending water and sewer lines to Germantown to provide town service for thirty low-income housing units, surveying businesses and demographics of retail space, rental rehabilitation loans for renovating rental units and a home ownership program.

Breakdown by activity for CDBG funds:

90% -\$1,760,138- public facilities  
 4%- \$76,525- housing  
 3%- \$59,500- property acquisition  
 1%- \$27,709- administration  
 <1%- \$16,400- economic development  
 <1%- \$ 9,000- demolition and clearance  
 <1%- \$ 5,500- relocation assistance

Berlin has made use of many other programs through the years to maintain, rehabilitate, and augment the community. Individual property owners in the Historic District are also encouraged to seek assistance through the Maryland Historical Trust when in need and the Berlin Planning Commission is currently examining the potential expansion of the Historic District.

The following are Community Legacy grants received by the Town in recent years:

2013	Façade and interior conversion-	\$50,000
2012	Façade and interior conversion-	\$50,000
2010	Facade Improvements	\$75,000
2011	Facade Improvements	\$50,000
2009	Property Acquisition	\$125,000

In 2008, we received a \$12,000 Main Street Improvement Grant from DHCD, with the town providing matching funds. That was the last year this grant has been open for applications.

We have heavily emphasized downtown improvement and worked to leverage our status as a Main Street Maryland community. The town has placed so much importance upon the revitalization of its downtown that it has created a dedicated position, filled by Michael Day, to undertake economic development and downtown revitalization. It is rather unusual for smaller municipalities in our area to make a commitment for a downtown revitalization position. This shows the level of commitment that Berlin has put into revitalization of the community and the goals of the Sustainable Communities Program.

## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

**(b) Describe any existing barriers to Smart Growth that may affect your jurisdiction or the proposed SC Area. For instance, does your area have higher development fees than outer “cornfields”?**

*(Answer Space 4,000 characters)*

The first and most obvious barrier to Smart Growth is the property taxes levied by municipalities. This inherently provides a strong disadvantage when competing with areas outside of city limits. The taxes collected by the town are over and above what is collected on behalf of Worcester County. Prospective developers therefore will want significant incentives in order to overcome this barrier. It has been our challenge to demonstrate to these developers that other advantages outweigh the barrier of increased taxes.

Along with other municipalities in the area, we have challenges with the rather low educational attainment of our workforce. This is something which is related to us by employers quite frequently. We do not have enough workers trained in specialized skills to fill the demand for large industrial and commercial employers. Worcester County exhibits one of the lowest high school graduation rates in the entire state of Maryland. Municipalities and counties are naturally in competition with one another to attract new business. Having challenges with our workforce dictates that we are at a competitive disadvantage.

The following challenges were identified by our residents in several surveys sent during the development of our current Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in 2010:

- Need for additional sidewalks and bicycle paths
- Concern among residents about sprawl, leading to a reluctance to welcome new development
- Lack of support among residents for the development of new housing
- Lack of support among residents for new annexations

The age of the buildings in the downtown and in most of the residential areas also represents a challenge, as the cost of maintenance and upkeep is a problem for some of our residents. Our income levels, as shown in the section on demographics, is significantly below the state levels, thus making it difficult for some of our historic buildings to get the attention they deserve.

The Town is one of only five municipalities in the state which operates its own electricity plant. Residents have the perception that this electricity service is costly. This is a challenge when courting new industry and business.

## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

### **B. Community Conditions: Strengths and Weaknesses**

**(1) Describe the strengths and weaknesses in the proposed Area's existing built environment. For example, what is the condition of housing? Are there underutilized historic buildings and cultural places? What is the condition and availability of community parks and recreational assets? Are there transportation assets? What is the current condition of community infrastructure such as roads and lighting? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

Although the village which became Berlin began in the 1790's, it was not incorporated until 1868, after the Civil War. The town grew and became a popular spot for tourists who enjoyed hunting and fishing on the Eastern Shore or were on their way to the small coastal town of Ocean City.

Berlin is noted as the birthplace of Stephen Decatur, the 19th century naval hero, as well as Charles Albert Tindley, reputed father of gospel music.

Today the town is a wonderful example of what can be done when citizens work together for the success of their community. The renovation of the town center and the historic preservation of the commercial and residential districts are a result of the cooperative efforts of local citizens, businesses and the Town government. Berlin's beautiful tree-lined street Victorian town center, museum and historic homes captivate those who visit.

Recent development in the Town has been primarily new residential, with some limited commercial development. Of that residential development, the new homes have been, without exception, large, single family homes being sold for greater than \$200,000.00. Opportunities for persons/families of low-moderate or moderate-middle income to own their own home have been virtually nonexistent.

Current sale and rental costs for business properties have also been on the increase, again limiting the opportunities for many persons to own or operate a business within the town.

Based on the findings of Berlin's Code Enforcement Department, many of Berlin's older, existing buildings, both residential and commercial, are in need of renovation, repair, or rehabilitation. However, because of the economic status of many of the owners of these homes, the necessary work is not being completed.

The downtown district relies mainly on a strong tourism economy, touting unique shopping and architecture. While the town has a charming look and appeal, the historic buildings are constantly in need of upkeep and repair. Because of the current economic conditions, many of the property owners are letting some repairs go, such as brick pointing and window maintenance.

The National Register of Historic Places lists 47 individual structures in Berlin, which represents nearly two centuries of architectural heritage. These structures are well preserved or renovated and date from three distinct periods: Federal, Victorian and 20th Century. The town center features mostly brick structures with compatible rooflines, proportionate window and door openings, uniform setbacks from the street and bulkheads beneath the lower windows.

The "historic heart" of Berlin as well as its minority neighborhood needs additional attention to allow us to maintain the historic structures that are the pride of the community.

The condition of housing is generally good, with the exception of some neighborhoods on the east side of Route 113. There are no underutilized cultural buildings. The town is giving a great deal of attention to developing more recreational facilities, as there is a recreational acreage deficit. A Parks and Recreation Plan is being implemented. Transportation assets include our proximity to two major highways, Routes 113 and 50. The condition of streets and lighting is generally good, with some needs in various areas throughout town.

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## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

**(2) Describe the Area's land use/zoning make-up (residential, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use). Is the current land use or zoning conducive to revitalization investment? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The town's Comprehensive Plan is the basis for our Sustainable Communities Plan in order to provide a cohesive and consistent plan of action. The Comprehensive Plan suggests the following improvements be made to our land use/zoning makeup in order to improve the quality of life in town and to meet the goals of our Sustainable Communities Plan:

- The town should establish separate commercial designations in the area of US Route 346 from those used in the downtown. US Route 346 is a major artery in town which is located outside of the downtown district. However, this particular roadway is home to a number of commercial ventures, many of which are service businesses such as restaurants, grocery stores, dry cleaners, and automotive repair establishments.
- Revise the planned unit development overlay district
- Protect forested areas and begin developing a greenbelt urban growth boundary around the entire town. This will further support our emphasis on environmentally friendly and green living. This would entail having protected areas along the entire boundary of the town of Berlin.
- Implement certain recommendations regarding the historic district which includes the evaluation of places of historic and cultural significance and the development of policies to protect cultural and historic places

The plan also recommends the creation of Sensitive Species Project Review Areas (SSPRA) and the following changes to town zoning in order to promote this concept:

- Require that proposed developers address the protection of endangered species. The developer must determine and justify whether the proposed activities will occur within areas of endangered species habitat
- Require developers to develop protection measures for endangered species in the project design. An environmental assessment will also be required.
- Require adherence to the state's Forest Conservation Act



## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

**3) Describe strengths and weaknesses in basic features of community quality-of-life. For instance, is crime an issue for this SC Area? What is the condition and quality of educational choices available to the community? Are artistic, cultural, or community resources, events or facilities within or accessible to residents in the proposed SC Area? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The Berlin Main Street Program, the Town and the Taylor House Museum have partnered to create a new event, "The Peach Festival", which will take place in August, with the Mayor proclaiming August as Peach Month in the town. Berlin was once the peach capital of the east coast and this festival is not only entertaining but also has an educational component celebrating our agricultural history as well. This is in addition to a popular New Year's Eve celebration and the Fiddlers' Convention in late September.

The town of Berlin does not have any significant problems with crime. We have a full time, full-service Police Department, with our services being augmented by the Worcester County Sheriff's Department and the Maryland State Police. The State Police have a barrack located on Route 50 just outside of the town. We do have occasional problems with relatively minor crimes such as assaults and burglaries. Many of these crimes are centered on the neighborhoods around US Route 113, specifically those neighborhoods on the East side of that highway.

The residents of Berlin are fortunate in that they have easy access to several colleges in the area. This includes Salisbury University, which is located in Salisbury, about 25 miles away. The University of Maryland Eastern shore is located in Princess Anne, which is about 35 miles away from Berlin. Wor-Wic Community College offers two-year degrees and a wide variety of vocational training. The school is headquartered in Salisbury but has classes available in Worcester County. The citizens of Berlin are served by four public schools. Stephen Decatur High School is located on Route 50 just outside of town. Students in pre-K through fourth grades are served by Buckingham Elementary School, while students in grades five and six are served by Berlin Intermediate School. Stephen Decatur Middle School serves those students who are in grades seven and eight. The Worcester Preparatory School, established in 1970, has an excellent reputation, having sent 99 percent of its students to college, in many cases to well-known, nationally known schools. It serves grades preschool through 12 and is located on Main Street on the southerly edge of town.

There are many cultural events available in Berlin. This is one of the primary duties of the town's Economic Development Director, Michael Day. The Globe Theatre offers a significant number of cultural events. The town has received designation as an Arts and Entertainment District and has a wide variety of cultural activities. One of the major projects in the works is a cultural center which would provide a dedicated venue for the many events that take place.

The downtown and the Historic District are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as are several individual buildings. The town has also received Main Street Maryland status.

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## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

### **C. Natural Resources and Environmental Impact: Strengths and Weaknesses**

**(1) Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the community's "natural environment." in or near the Sustainable Community Area. What is the current condition of key natural resources - lands, air, water, watersheds, tree canopy, other? If the community is located in a coastal zone, what risks might the community be subject to associated with climate induced sea level rise? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

There are several ditches and streams which drain into Berlin and its planning area. These streams drain into the Newport and Isle of Wight Bays, as well as the Pocomoke River which drains into the Chesapeake Bay. Certain portions of town are wetlands. There are additional wetlands in the surrounding areas. Certain portions of town are classified as of Special State Concern in regard to species habitation.

A Sensitive Species Project Review Area has been established by the state of Maryland Department of Natural Resources near US Route 50 and US Route 818, which is Main Street. This area may contain rare, threatened or endangered species. Our planning documents require that development in this area take this factor into consideration.

Berlin does not have many of the environmental issues that other communities in the State of Maryland have. This is due primarily to its location on the Lower Eastern Shore, an area which is sparsely populated compared to the balance of the state. The area is primarily rural in nature.

The town of Berlin's sole source of water is groundwater from the Pocomoke Aquifer within the Yorktown Formation. This is the shallowest aquifer within the Chesapeake group. There is thus the potential for salt water intrusion. The Town's Comprehensive Plan notes that sufficient water will be available for full build-out if usage is monitored and adequate conservation measures are continued. The Town is committed to water conservation.

Resources -- lands, air, water, watersheds, trees and other resources-are in good condition. We have been fortunate to have not encountered any pollution or overdevelopment which would threaten these resources. One of the biggest industries in Worcester County is tourism. Visitors are attracted by the scenic and rural nature of the county. Historical resources are abundant and have been preserved largely due to the low level of development. These factors dictate that it is important to the county's economy that the municipalities and rural areas maintain these resources in integrity.

The town also contains several areas in the 100-year floodplain. The town is not in a coastal flood zone area.

## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

**(2) Describe the strengths and weaknesses of any current efforts to reduce the community's "carbon footprint" or impact on the environment. Is recycling (commercial or residential) available to minimize waste? Are there current efforts to encourage the purchase and availability of fresh local food and other local products and services to the community? Describe any current energy or water conservation efforts that may be underway. If the community has not implemented one of the above initiatives, has the community identified a need or interest to pursue these or other efforts to reduce environmental impact, for instance through the new Sustainable Maryland Certified initiative? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

Grow Berlin Green is a new non-profit organization whose mission to make Berlin very "green". They have partnered with our Main Street Program on several projects including a recycling program for the downtown merchants. The Town has also applied for grant funding through the National Park Service to create a "rain garden", which will be a model for others within the town.

On April 21, 2012, the Town's first annual cleanup event will be held. This was a week-long activity which concluded on Saturday, April 28 with the first annual Berlin Trail Mix. This event is sponsored by the Berlin Parks Commission and Grow Berlin Green. Volunteers will gather in the town parks, the downtown and nature areas to pick up any debris and trash. Volunteers will also assist with weeding, raking and mulching. The town has scheduled its spring yard waste collection dates to follow this event. The Trail Mix refers to an event at the Berlin Intermediate School. This is the inaugural opening of the trail network with trails for walking, biking or running throughout Berlin and neighboring areas of Worcester County.

In February of 2012, the Maryland Conservation Corps from Assateague and Pocomoke River State Parks worked to build 40 rain barrels. The Maryland Coastal Bays Program and Grow Berlin Green provided the staff time and funding for rain barrel parts. The goal of this project is to empower citizens to protect the water ways and homes from excess storm water runoff. Citizens who receive these rain barrels will be able to decrease the water flowing into the bays, carrying excess nutrient and pollution with it. The barrels will be taken to Berlin Intermediate School or students will distribute them and develop educational materials for citizens on why and how to use them.

A Farmers' Market is available during the growing season (May through November).

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## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

**(3) Describe the strengths and weaknesses of the jurisdiction's current stormwater management practices and how these may affect the proposed SC Area. Is redevelopment and retrofitting of infrastructure an issue or opportunity in this SC Area? Stormwater runoff is a significant source of pollution to Maryland's streams and the Chesapeake Bay. Buildings constructed before 1985 have little or no stormwater controls, and development between 1985 and 2010 have some controls. Updated stormwater regulations passed by Maryland's General Assembly in 2010 require that development and redevelopment projects utilize stringent stormwater controls. Sustainable Community Areas may have opportunities for redevelopment practices that can reduce stormwater flows. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The University of Maryland Environmental Science Center, with support from the Town Creek Foundation of Easton, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and the town of Berlin, is now in the final stage of drafting a storm water financing feasibility study. Work on the study began in June of 2011 and recommendations are to be submitted to the town Council by the end of May of 2012.

Data to be included in the study have been collected via site visits to problem locations around town, a series of public meetings, recommendations from the town engineer, and meetings with community leaders. The ESC is also using data published in the July 2007 Army Corps of Engineers report.

Many water quality and quantity concerns have been expressed by Berlin residents, community leaders, and business owners. There have been serious issues with flooding at times of heavy rain. These issues specifically include litter, inadequate maintenance of storm water conveyance systems, public safety, and property loss. The study will propose financing mechanisms that are intended to help the town of Berlin address these problems by building and financing a sustainable storm water program.

A storm water photo contest was held in October of 2011. A storm water stakeholder committee, composed of key community leaders, has also held a series of meetings to guide the year-long outreach strategy. Outreach continues with presentations to interested organizations, including churches, town committees and homeowners' associations.

## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

### **D. Economic Conditions & Access to Opportunity: Strengths and Weaknesses**

**(1) Describe the jurisdiction's current economic strengths and weaknesses. For example, are there distinct economic drivers in the area or region that will affect access to job opportunities and the progress of the SC Plan? What are the main barriers to the Area's economic competitiveness? What is the current level of broadband access available to serve residents, businesses and public facilities? What efforts are currently in place to increase worker skills and employment? Describe trends in employment rates and business formation.**

*(Answer Space 4,000 characters)*

As of December of 2011, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that Worcester County's unemployment rate was 15.6%, substantially higher than the State rate of 6.5%. This rate is relatively high because of seasonal positions in Ocean City.

The major strength of the economy of Berlin and Worcester County is its location in a rural and scenically beautiful area. The many attractions around the water and the unique culture of the Delmarva Peninsula have proven to be an economic draw, resulting in significant numbers of visitors, some of whom come from Ocean City to see some of the other attractions of the area.

Last year, utility rates caused many of the merchants downtown much concern and several even voiced that they may have to close shop do to extremely high electric rates. In order to keep attracting visitors, especially from the Ocean City area, the downtown must maintain its well kept look.

Berlin is a Maryland Arts and Entertainment District. However, the community is lacking any type of performing arts center. A few years ago, the Worcester County government identified the need for some type of performing arts center to be built in the Berlin area. The Multi-Purpose Building located on Flower Street, within the Arts and Entertainment District, could serve such a need, but the condition of the building has prevented most groups from taking advantage of the possibilities that it may have to offer.

The weaknesses in the local economy are as follows: relatively low educational attainment, lack of a skilled workforce, low economic indicators such as a low median income and a high poverty rate, lack of infrastructure, and lack of facilities for higher end businesses such as those dealing with information technology. In addition, the relatively poor state of the economy dictates that the local government cannot provide significant incentives from its own budget.

Until about fifteen years ago, the downtown area consisted of a wide variety of stores which had been there for a number of years. Many of these were family-owned businesses that sold hardware, clothing, and household goods. Approximately eight to ten years ago, Berlin's downtown changed dramatically. A number of the family-owned stores that had been in the downtown for many years disappeared to make way for a number of antique stores. In addition, various other specialty stores, including an upscale bakery, came to the downtown. With the renovation of the Atlantic Hotel in the early 1990's, the downtown became a center for tourism in the area. The Arts and Entertainment District designation will give more weight to the Town's efforts to attract additional businesses and will piggyback with the Enterprise Zone benefits in order to draw additional businesses.

Broadband is available in the area. Our Economic Development Director works individually with businesses to identify training programs. Most of the workforce works for the commercial sector.

## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

**(2) Describe the jurisdiction's housing market and access to affordable workforce housing. What are the trends in residential construction (rental and homeownership), homeownership rate, foreclosure rate and, property values. Describe how and whether your jurisdiction's prevailing housing costs - both homeownership and rental - are affordable to households below 120% AMI, 80% AMI and 50% AMI. What efforts are in place currently to house individuals, families and the disabled at or below the AMI levels described above? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The homeownership rate has remained relatively stable over the past 20 years. Per the 2010 Census, there are 1953 housing units in the town, with 1688 vacant, for a vacancy rate of 13.6%. Of these housing units, 59.2% are owner-occupied and 40.8% are renter-occupied. A sizeable percentage of our residents are of low and moderate income. This particular population group is challenged to purchase new homes due to the initial outlay for down payment and settlement costs. Being a renter is generational in many of our families, with very few being able to accomplish the purchase of a home.

The income levels in Berlin are relatively lower than in many other regions on the Eastern Shore and in the State of Maryland. As such, it is affordable to those with incomes below 120 percent, 80 percent, and 50 percent of the annual median incomes. The town works with the Worcester County Commissioners in order to market the funds available for housing rehabilitation, which is geared to low and moderate income people.

The following are some of the challenges that we currently face which will be addressed through our Sustainable Communities Plan:

- Need to create new affordable housing units and preserve the existing affordable housing units
- Need to continue to promote redevelopment and residential infill development
- Need to monitor a relatively high foreclosure rate
- Need to develop policies for new affordable housing developments and future subdivisions
- Need for additional commercial development to provide jobs and services
- Need to address problems in lower income neighborhoods without creating pockets of poverty throughout the town
- Need for an education program to help new homeowners plan realistic housing budgets
- Need to develop an outreach program for homeowners and renters in order to address neighborhood issues

## **II. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASELINE INFORMATION**

**(3) Describe the SC Area's demographic trends (with respect to age, race, household size, household income, educational attainment, or other relevant factors). (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

Much of the commercial activity in town is centered around the Atlantic General Hospital. This area contains a number of medical office buildings. The residential area adjacent to this commercial area is largely minority, and its residents are of low-and-moderate income. Housing here has been improved over the years through various state and federally-funded grant programs. However, it continues to exhibit signs of deterioration. Residents of this area have a lower median household income than the balance of the town residential areas, as well as a higher unemployment rate. Many of the citizens in this area work in seasonal jobs in Ocean City, and are unemployed for a portion of the year. There are some multi-family units in the area as well as single-family homes.

The total population of Berlin is 4,485, per the 2010 Census.

There are a number of indicators of economic distress in the Town. The poverty rate as of 2009 was 13.6%, compared to the US rate of poverty of 11.2%. Other distress indicators include substandard housing and high unemployment rates. High unemployment rates have limited the quality of life in Berlin and Worcester County. The seasonal nature of employment here has resulted in one of the highest unemployment rates in the State, particularly during the winter months. This is due in part to the seasonal nature of jobs in Ocean City, which is seven miles away. Unemployment during the winter reaches between 15 to 20 %, compared to the unemployment rate of 6.0 % for the balance of the state. Downturns in the agriculture and seafood industries have created persistent economic problems. Job creation has not been adequate to keep up with job losses.

The Town's racial composition as of the 2010 Census is as follows: white 68.8%, black or African American 23.3%, and other races 7.9%. The median age is 38.4.

Per the 2006-2010 American Community Survey, 78.9% of residents 25 years of age and over have earned a high school diploma or higher, with 16.1% having a bachelor's degree or higher. Approximately 3.6% of Town residents have a graduate or bachelor's degree.

The following figures are taken from the 2009 American Community Survey. The town's median income of \$47,441 is substantially below the state's median income of \$69,272. The 2009 median house value was \$245,490 substantially less than the state median house value at the time, \$318,600. New building has declined steadily over the past few years. In 2010, no building permits were issued, while 2 were issued in 2009, 24 in 2008, 61 in 2007, and 101 in 2006.

### **III. LOCAL CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT PLANS & PROJECTS**

#### **A. Organizational Structure:**

**Describe the Applicant's organizational structure. Specifically, which organizations are members in the Sustainable Communities Workgroup and who are the respective staff? Who are the leaders, and how will the Workgroup advisor or staff manage implementation of the SC Area Plan? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The following are the members of the Berlin Sustainable Communities Work Group:

Mike Wiley - Chair, Berlin Parks Commission  
                                 Berlin Chamber of Commerce  
                                 Main Street Clean, Safe and Green Committee  
 Terri Sexton – Chair, Main Street Berlin  
                                 Main Street Berlin Organization Committee  
 Robin Tomaselli – Berlin Arts & Entertainment Committee  
 Dave Engelhart – Director of Berlin Department of Planning  
 Mary Bohlen – Town of Berlin Deputy Town Administrator  
 JoAnn Unger – Town of Berlin Assistant to the Mayor  
 Elaine Brady – Publisher Bayside Gazette  
                                 Past President of Berlin Chamber of Commerce  
 Michael Day – Director of Berlin Community & Economic Development  
 Laura Allen – Town of Berlin Town Administrator

Mr. Day also functions as staff to the SC work group. The ranking member of the work group is Town Administrator Allen, who will supervise the process of seeking funds for the projects specified in the plan as well as their implementation.

The Town's Main Street Program will administer the project with the Town's Director of Economic Development, Michael Day submitting the quarterly reports and payment requests. The project will have over-site by Mary Bohlen, Deputy Town Administrator, who has also administered numerous CDBG grants, and Natalie Saleh, Finance Director for the Town.



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### **III. LOCAL CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT PLANS & PROJECTS**

#### **B.Organizational Experience:**

**Describe the Applicant organization's past experience in administering revitalization plans and projects. Describe the roles of the members of the Sustainable Communities Workgroup, including their experience in implementing revitalization initiatives. What are the strengths and challenges of the capacity of these groups with respect to implementation of the SC Plan? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

Mary Bohlen has administered numerous CDBG grants as well as others from the State. Michael Day was responsible for administering Main Street Improvement matching grant as well as managing the three previous Community Legacy Grants for façade funding. In addition, he has administered a CL grant for property acquisition (\$125,000) as well as a private foundation grant for \$150,000. He has also administered numerous small Maryland State Arts Council grants. Natalie Saleh, Director of Finance for the Town, has also worked closely with Mr. Day in administering these grants. She also served as Senior Accountant for the grants in the past.

**III. LOCAL CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT PLANS & PROJECTS****C. Public Input:**

**How did residents and other stakeholders in the community provide input to Action Plan described below in Section IV?** *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)*

Public input was provided during the meeting at which the resolution was adopted and by the members of the Sustainable Communities Work Group who represent citizens and community organizations.

Two meetings of this group were held, one on 9/12/13 and the other on 9/19/13. The group chose the future projects which are included in this plan.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

The Sustainable Community Action Plan (SC Plan or Plan) is meant to be a multi-year investment strategy - a strategic set of revitalization initiatives and projects that local partners believe will increase the economic vitality and livability of their community, increased prosperity for local households and improved health of the surrounding environment. The Plan should be flexible enough to be updated regularly and renewed every five years as the community envisions new goals. The priority initiatives and projects in the SC Plan should improve the livability of community places -- residential, commercial, or other public or private properties - and create new work, retail, recreational and housing opportunities for residents. These projects should also reduce the environmental impact of the community through water and energy resource conservation and management strategies. In this way, the Plan can be a road map for local stakeholders as well as State agencies to work together to create a more a sustainable and livable community.

##### **A. Supporting existing communities & reducing environmental impacts.**

**(1) A community's approach to Smart Growth generally includes two inter-related areas of focus: encouraging reinvestment and growth in existing communities; and, discouraging growth that degrades natural resources, and farms and rural landscapes. Broadly describe your jurisdiction's Smart Growth approach and any significant accomplishments made over the last decade or so. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

As a municipality, the Town of Berlin is well-positioned to promote Smart Growth. This has been our policy since this concept was enacted into law.

A number of state funding programs require that the project take place within a Smart Growth area, or Priority Funding Area. We are therefore experienced with planning projects which will be in compliance with the Smart Growth concept. The Town has aggressively pursued grant funds available through the Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

The town of Berlin has followed the letter and spirit of Smart Growth legislation. We have worked cooperatively with the state in order to direct all development in our area to within town limits. We are attuned to the benefits of Smart Growth and have incorporated this principle into our policies.

These grants enable the town to follow a revitalization strategy which has proven successful. The downtown area was in decline until recent years when a number of antique shops located there. However, the store owners have been operating on tight margins and have not had the funding to improve their façades. These buildings are relatively old and have had issues over the years. It is therefore necessary to undertake renovation work on a consistent basis. The façade grants enabled us to keep these businesses in the downtown and create a critical mass of shopping which has made Berlin one of the centers of tourism on the Lower Eastern Shore. We are known for our antique stores and various promotional events. As such, we represent a unique opportunity for visitors and offer many things that cannot be found elsewhere in our area. One of these includes our close proximity to Ocean City. We are only seven miles from the beach resort. Our Peach Festival and Fiddlers Convention in September are not duplicated elsewhere.

Specific attractions which promote Smart Growth are as follows: Globe Theater, Atlantic Hotel, the studios of 7 individual artists, the Berlin Coffee House and four other restaurants, the Water's Edge Gallery, Jeff Auxer Glass Studio, offices of the Worcester County Arts Council, A Step Above Gallery, and the JJ Fish Studio and Gallery. These attractions draw a substantial number of visitors and enhance Berlin's position as a regional arts and entertainment center. There are also several antique shops which are attractive to visitors.

The town of Berlin is fully committed to take its place as the cultural center of this portion of Worcester County, realizing that the town has a place to fill which is different from that of Ocean City.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(2) Describe any major investments in community infrastructure -water, stormwater, sewer, sidewalk, lighting, etc. -- that must be undertaken in order to improve the readiness or competitiveness of the proposed SC Area for private investment and compliance (if applicable) with TMDL regulations. Addressing the stormwater during redevelopment can reduce the pollution entering our streams and contribution to the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. Investments in infrastructure, generally, can be an important catalyst for new private investment in the community. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The following projects have been identified for inclusion in our Sustainable Communities program as adopted by the work group. Other projects will be discussed in succeeding sections. Those projects were primarily taken from recommendations of the current Comprehensive Plan.

- Storm Water Management
- Sidewalks
- Paving and Cross Walks in Selected Areas
- Revolving Loan Fund
- Implementation of the Parks and Recreation Plan
- Permanent Restroom Facilities in Parks
- Pocket Park Development
- Skateboard Park
- New Police Station
- New Community Center
- Water Tower
- Shuttle Bus
- Livability Issues
- Home Ownership Opportunities
- Live Ability Issues
- 1. Low Income & Work Force Housing Opportunities
- 2. Low Income & Work Force Housing Rehabilitation Loans & Grants
- Festival/Event/Entertainment Venue (other than downtown)

Although our sidewalks are in generally good condition, there are certain neighborhoods which are in need of sidewalk replacement or new sidewalks. It is our goal to have all areas in town connected to the downtown by sidewalks. The areas most in need of new sidewalk construction are as follows:\_\_\_\_\_.

Paving and crosswalks will also be provided in certain high-traffic areas, such as-----.

The revolving loan funds would be used to assist new businesses in the downtown. A low interest rate would be charged and a local match would be required. The purpose of this project would be to attract new business and retain existing business. The development of the architectural guidelines and standards is necessary in order to preserve the historic resources and the character of the neighborhoods and the downtown. The town has never had uniform standards so this project is a high priority.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(3) Describe policies, initiatives or projects that the community will undertake or expand in order to reduce the SC Area's impact on the environment. Examples include but are not limited to: conservation or management of stormwater through retrofitting of streets and by-ways (Green Streets, rain gardens, etc.); retrofitting of facilities and homes for energy conservation; implementation of "green" building codes and mixed-use zoning; recycling of waste; clean-ups of watersheds; and, encouragement of "Buy Local" approaches that benefit local suppliers and food producers. A comprehensive menu of such actions may be found through the nonprofit Sustainable Maryland Certified initiative. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The following are projects and policies designed to reduce the SC's impact on the environment:

- Require a 25 foot buffer along streams to reduce the adverse impacts of runoff into the Maryland coastal bays and the Chesapeake Bay
- Require a 25- foot buffer around non-tidal wetlands and a 100 foot buffer around areas of special state concern.
- Require all developers to investigate areas that may contain sensitive, rare, threatened or endangered species prior to building
- Adopt a Critical Areas ordinance in order to be prepared for the annexation of any land contained within the Critical Area

The Grow Berlin Green project is already implementing a number of projects aimed at reducing the impacts of development on the environment. Grow Berlin Green (GBG) is a new campaign dedicated to establishing the town of Berlin, Maryland, and surrounding areas as a model community for participatory environmental protection, conservation and smart growth.

Managed by a coalition of the Assateague Coastal Trust (ACT), the Lower Shore Land Trust (LSLT) and the Maryland Coastal Bays Program (MCBP), GBG is driven by community education, empowerment and action.

The GBG campaign was introduced at a Town Hall meeting February 10th, 2009.

Berlin's Parks Commission partnered with GBG to establish the annual "Take Pride in Berlin" Spring Clean up Day which was recognized by the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore as one of the top five successful clean up events.

GBG and the Town of Berlin have started a recycling service where area businesses have access to recycling at no charge.

GBG is commissioning a study to evaluate new stormwater management strategies. The study will identify stormwater "hot spots" in the Town, identify new technologies best suited to address these areas, and present recommendations for how the Town can implement these measures in a cost-effective manner. The timing of the study coincides with the anticipated adoption this spring by the Town Council of a new stormwater management ordinance regulating runoff control from all new development.

**IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(4) Which community groups or stakeholders will be key to the implementation of the initiatives and projects noted in this section? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The Mayor and Council of the Town will be fundamentally involved in the approval of, and funding for, the initiatives anticipated. However, Grow Berlin Green has become an important partner with the Town and that organization will be consulted regularly.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

##### **B. Valuing communities and neighborhoods -- building upon assets and building in amenities:**

**(1) What are the key assets that exist in the community upon which the Plan's projects and initiatives will build? Assets may include physical assets such as parks and historic structures and also civic and economic assets such as employers, educational institutions, and cultural organizations and activities. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

Along with offering standard municipal services such as police protection, trash and recycling collection and a water and wastewater plant/system, the town of Berlin owns and operates a municipal electric plant, one of only five in the State of Maryland.

Berlin has many community and civic based organizations including a Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club and two American Legion posts as well as grass roots organizations such as the Berlin Community Improvement Association, an Arts and Entertainment District Committee, a Main Street Committee and other, small, specific-goal oriented groups. Under the auspices of the Town government, there are a number of boards and commissions such as a Planning and Zoning Commission, Historic District Commission, Commercial District Management Authority and a Parks Commission. All of these groups, both public and private, have an established history of working together toward common goals for the betterment of the community.

There is also a hospital, five schools (four public and one private) within the Town, nine churches and a museum as well as a U.S. Post Office, public library and volunteer fire company.

In June of 2005 Berlin was awarded Maryland Main Street status. This effort has become very well organized and has energized the downtown business community. Through their efforts, and the funding of the Main Street Improvement grant, many improvements have been made in the downtown district. Events and attendance at events downtown have been very strong this past year and seem to be growing in popularity. There is also a very high level of working together by the various groups within the town.

The town of Berlin is persistent in noting and acting on building code violations, which can include not only physical building problems, but also issues such as sidewalks in disrepair or accumulations of "junk".

The Town Planning and Zoning Department, the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals and the Historic District Commission are also diligent in the application of building codes and standards in the building of new structures.

Using Maryland Smart Codes as received from the Maryland Department of Planning, the Planning Commission is in the process of revising the Town of Berlin Comprehensive Plan as well as proposing considerable changes to the Code of the Town of Berlin.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(2) What policies, initiatives or projects will reuse or enhance the historical assets, traditional business districts/Main Streets and cultural resources of the community? What actions will reinforce your community's authentic "sense of place" and historic character? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The East side of Berlin is divided by Rt.113, thus maintaining a perceived racial divide within the town. Investing in the Multi-Purpose Building will help bring cohesiveness to the Arts and Entertainment District, as well as the community.

We will undertake the following initiatives in order to enhance these resources and reinforce our community's authentic sense of place;

- Emphasize cultural tourism and ecotourism
- Promotion of attractions
- Assist owners of historic properties in taking advantage of various tax credits and other financial incentives

Renovation of or rebuilding the Multi-Purpose Building has been discussed for a number of years. By actually putting dollars into this project, the town and state will galvanize the community into a positive force bringing various art and community groups together with a common goal.

The downtown is thriving. In the past twenty years, Berlin has become a center for antiques and has drawn visitors from the surrounding area as well as visitors to Ocean City who wish to experience the unique ambiance of the downtown area. Renovation of the town center and the historic preservation of the commercial and residential districts are a result of the cooperative efforts of local citizens, businesses and the town government. Visitors enjoy Berlin's tree lined streets, Victorian town center, museum and historic homes.

There are forty-seven individual structures in Berlin which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The town center features mostly brick structures with compatible roof lines and uniform setbacks from the street. Two distinct assets in the downtown are the Globe Theatre and the Atlantic Hotel, which is recognized as one of the best examples of its kind on the Lower Eastern Shore.

The downtown also plays host to a number of well-attended special attractions throughout the year. These include the Spring Celebration in March; the Farmer's Market, held from April through December; Spring Arts Night in May; Old Fashioned Memorial Day in May; the Village Fair in June; the Fiddlers Convention in September; the Fall Festival in October; Arts Night in November; and the Victorian Christmas in December.

The Calvin B. Taylor House, a museum depicting life in Berlin from the early 1800's to the present, is also an historical asset. Local antiques, artifacts and written histories allow visitors an historical glimpse into the lives of town citizens.



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#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(3) Describe policies, initiatives or projects that will increase community access to green spaces, parks and other amenities? A community can gain social and physical benefits from access to a healthy natural environment. The inclusion of complete streets, trails, green space, parks and trees contribute to the character and health of a community. Examples might include improvements to the tree canopy by planting street trees, improving local neighborhood streams, or reusing a vacant lot for a new community park or playground.***(Answer Space 4,000 characters)*

Five percent of Berlin's land is being used for recreational purposes. These facilities include the Stephen Decatur Park on Tripoli Street, the Dr. William Henry Park located on Flower Street and the John Howard Burbage Park located in front of the electric facility. There has been a demand for an indoor/outdoor privately owned recreational facility, such as a YMCA, to provide various organized activities to the public at an affordable price.

Stephen Decatur Park and the Henry Park are our general use facilities that are located within a close proximity to several residential neighborhoods. These parks have picnic, playground, and support facilities. Tennis, racquetball, and basketball courts are distributed among the two. Both have served as gathering places for various events. A pavilion in each park is available for use by the public. The Community Parks and Playgrounds Program provided funding to improve the parks in 2005 and in 2009. Burbage Park, a small pocket park located in front of the power plant, consists primarily of a bench and some landscaping.

Worcester County owns and operates a large park with a baseball field and other recreational facilities along Buckingham Lane on the south side of Berlin. This park attracts a number of people both locally and regionally.

Our Comprehensive Plan recommends the development of a greenbelt around the municipal boundaries of Berlin. We have incorporated that into our Sustainable Communities Plan.

According to state standards, the town of Berlin is approximately 27 acres in deficit in regard to an appropriate amount of recreational facilities and open spaces. Future growth projections show that perhaps as many as 55 additional acres will be needed within the next 20 years or so.

Public recreational and green space that is already existing should continue to be redeveloped. Much of the current Park acreage is undeveloped. The facilities that do exist include playground sports and picnic facilities. The 2008 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan provided a methodology for improving each of the existing facilities and providing linkages among them in order to optimize participation by our residents and visitors.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(4) Which community groups or stakeholders will be key to the implementation of the initiatives and projects noted in this section? *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)***

The Town and the Recreation Commission will be involved in this aspect of the SC plan.

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## **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

### **C. Enhancing economic competitiveness**

**(1) What economic development policies, initiatives or projects will improve the economy through investments in small businesses and other key employment sectors? What economic development and business incentives will you build upon or implement as part of the SC Plan? Examples could include but are not limited to: green-taping for expedited project application review; permitting and inspection; job training; business tax credits; and, revolving loan funds. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

Community Legacy projects will assist the Town with working toward its goals of a safe, thriving and attractive community. Proposed projects include revolving loans to be available to property owners for property rehabilitation/renovation or improvements such as fixing code-related building issues or fixing sidewalks. Façade renovation projects should entice property owners to invest more in their buildings and perhaps create peer pressure by the surrounding property owners to do likewise. Due to the age of these buildings, there is a more or less continuing need for renovation. We therefore feel that an additional \$50,000 should be sought in grant funds for more façade work. We believe that approximately 5 businesses could be assisted with an allocation of that size. This would enable businesses to stay in their current locations and be able to manage and handle the maintenance required of an historic building.

We have found that having a dedicated economic development position pays for itself many times over. Mr. Day actively works with businesses and explains our incentives and seeks grant funds in order to provide funding to pay for the incentives.

One of the most important of the incentives is the Enterprise Zone. We have made it a priority to keep the Enterprise Zone designation current. The town is actively marketing the Enterprise Zone benefits available in conjunction with the Worcester County Economic Development Department. Our partnership with the department has given a significant impetus to our economic development efforts. In concert, our two offices have worked at marketing actively the many state financial incentive programs. We have individually counseled prospective businesses in order to entice them to come to Berlin. In most cases, we have found that adequate resources exist to provide these incentives.

In addition to the façade program, we plan to seek funds for a revolving loan. We would request these funds, probably in the neighborhood of \$75,000, from either the Community Legacy Program or the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Business Enterprise Grant Program. These funds would enable new business to locate in the community at a very low-interest rate and with a very favorable term. Each particular loan would be tailored to fit the needs of the borrower.

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#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(2) What workforce development policies, initiatives or projects will increase access to jobs and economic opportunity for residents in the SC Area? Do you have a goal for job creation? Are green jobs an opportunity in the jurisdiction or SC Area? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The Town will be active in disseminating information regarding the state's workforce development assistance programs. We will target training programs as this has been an issue for prospective new employers in the county in the past. This is due in part to the low educational attainment of county residents. The state of Maryland has a full range of excellent training programs which have been relatively underutilized here. We will be proactive in ensuring that prospective new employers are fully aware of the plethora of assistance programs available for job training. We are aware that adequate resources exist at the state level to handle workforce training in our area. Our charge will be to make sure that our local employers are well versed on these various programs and that they are enabled to participate through the assistance of our Economic Development Director. We will work to facilitate and assist the participation of these businesses in the training programs.

Any new businesses which locate in Berlin will have an immediate impact on job creation. This is another justification for creating a business friendly approach to permitting and inspections.

It is our policy to assist our new and prospective businesses as much as possible. We believe that the role of local government in economic development is extremely important. We have thus taken a policy of being proactive toward economic development and workforce development.

Our proposed façade improvement program and the revolving loan program can be expected to provide new jobs. In the case of the façade improvement program, this will come about primarily through the new businesses attracted to the downtown due to its revitalized appearance. Our county has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state.

We will encourage our businesses to hire local residents and minorities. It has been our experience that local firms seem to prefer hiring local residents in order to provide a more stable base among their employees. Residents of our area tend to stay at a job for a number of years. This is attractive to prospective new employers, and is a benefit in workforce development.

**IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(3) Describe whether the Sustainable Community will be impacted by the Base Re-alignment and Closure (BRAC) activities in Maryland. If impacted, how do the initiatives and projects in your Plan complement BRAC-related growth? (If not applicable, all ten points will be assessed based on answers to questions 1, 2, and 4) (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

N/A

**IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(4) Which community groups or stakeholders will be key to the implementation of the initiatives and projects noted in this section? *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)***

The following groups will be involved in the projects discussed in this section: the Town of Berlin, the Berlin Chamber of Commerce, and the Worcester County Economic Development Department.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

##### **D. Promoting access to quality affordable housing.**

**(1) What housing policies, initiatives or projects will expand housing choices - rental and homeownership -- for people of a range of ages, incomes, and also for disabled individuals? How will these actions address the current housing conditions and needs noted in Section II? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The Comprehensive Plan includes the following objectives, which we are adopting for purposes of our Sustainable Communities Plan.

The Plan states that Berlin should address workforce housing needs. There should be a mix of affordable rental and homeownership housing opportunities, particularly for persons of lower income.

Our Sustainable Communities Plan includes the re-development of the current housing stock and infill development. This will ensure that homeowners and renters have their properties maintained in an acceptable fashion. This is an extremely important component of our plan, as housing repairs, if deferred for too long, can result in severe deterioration. At that point, it is not feasible to repair the dwelling and it is lost to the housing stock. The town will be proactive in encouraging citizens to apply for CDBG-funded housing rehabilitation monies managed by the Worcester County Commissioners. The county government has, for the past 15 years, received funds from the Community Development Block Grant Program and the state Special Loans Program to rehabilitate the homes of low and moderate income households. Those living within municipal boundaries are eligible to apply. It is conceivable that we could develop a housing counseling service for our residents which would market the County's housing rehabilitation program.

We will also provide education and outreach to citizens and developers concerning the need to address housing affordability. The town of Berlin already has in place a very efficient system for public education. We regularly send press releases to the local newspapers and include information on important issues on our website, which is updated frequently. We also have regular contact with all of our neighborhood groups, which would be the ones most concerned with housing issues. However, we have also found it effective to be in contact with all groups, including groups of business people and service clubs as well as churches. This has proven to be a very effective method for informing our citizens. It is absolutely essential that our residents are aware of all the various housing assistance programs which are available to them.

It is also our goal to provide workforce housing nearest to where the jobs are located or near public transportation stops in town. The only public transportation is Shore Transit, which serves Berlin and other areas in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties. This is essential due to the fact that a sizable percentage of our low and moderate income population does not have a vehicle. In some cases, this could be a major impediment to holding down a job. We have seen instances where this has actually precluded some residents from working. We feel that it is part of our public charge to eliminate this problem so the residents are readily able to find work which pays a living wage.

Finally, our Sustainable Communities Plan includes examining the effect and feasibility of allowing accessory dwelling units, such as apartments in garages and mother-in-law units.

The town is also working on developing an energy code that will reduce energy costs for residents and energy-efficient dwellings.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(2) Will these housing initiatives or projects increase access to transit or community walkability and/or decrease transportation costs? In other words, will the housing investments result in more people living near work or town centers, or able to more conveniently reach work, school, shopping and/or recreation?** *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)*

Worcester County is one of the most rural areas of the state. For this reason, there are limited choices in transit. Citizens must either utilize their own vehicles or take advantage of limited public bus service. The Town will hold discussions with Shore Transit to determine ways in which service may be increased due to the significant demand we have seen.

The network of sidewalks in the downtown is essentially complete. However, many other residential areas are not connected by sidewalks. We will continue an on-going effort to ensure that sidewalks are installed or repaired throughout the town as needed.

The following are specific steps which will be taken by the town to increase transit or community walk ability:

- Using the guidelines of the State Highway Administration, create scenic gateways, streetscapes, and other improvements along the state highway maintained roads in town
- Protect the character of Main Street by limiting the number of ingress and egress points
- Request a scenic easement along a portion of Old Ocean City Boulevard west of town and create a scenic gateway into Berlin
- Finalize and submit plans to the State Highway Administration requiring developers to install sidewalks and bicycle paths along Old Ocean City Boulevard between US Route 113 and US Route 50
- Create sidewalks and signalized crosswalks in the area east of US Route 113 so residents can safely access commercial services on the west side of Route 113
- Require traffic impact analyses for all new commercial developments and all new residential developments greater than four lots
- Require developers to pay for sidewalks
- Develop a master plan which will include the following: extending the town's traditional grid system into newer areas, reducing noise, lessening the impact on neighboring streets, developing standards for the removal of cul-de-sacs, dead end streets, and traffic calming devices
- Development of a west side collector street
- Place bike racks throughout town to encourage residents to use bicycles more frequently
- Examine the feasibility of developing a trail along the existing and former railroad areas on the east side of Berlin, as well as near the downtown area



#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(3) What is your goal for of number of units to be created of affordable workforce housing, rental and homeownership? What populations (by income or special needs) will benefit from this increased access to affordable housing? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

In developing our housing policy, we will look at the needs of the following groups: low and moderate income families with children, those living in deteriorated housing, and the elderly. Funds will be obtained through a partnership of strong private investment with substantial government participation.

The Town has set a goal for the creation of ---- new housing units per year over the next five years, for a total of ----- new housing units. This would accommodate approximately--- persons. It is our expectation that, of that amount, approximately--- would be current residents who are living in substandard housing, while the remaining --- would be new residents. Due to the low median income and high poverty rate evidenced in the town, it is expected that at least two thirds of these new units would be made available to and be suitable for low and moderate income persons and families. Over ---- units would be homeownership units and the remaining would be rental units.

The Town's Comprehensive Plan notes the following housing needs:

- 16 percent of the town's population is below the poverty line, as affirmed by the 2006 -- 2010 American Community Survey
- Creating and preserving affordable rental units is the best way to address lower income households' housing needs. Of the 862 housing units, 40 percent were rental units.
- Only three percent of the rental units were vacant and available for rent during the 2006 – 2010 American Community Survey period
- Affordable and diverse housing options must be made available to those with substandard credit-ratings and/or low incomes.

**IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(4) Which community groups or stakeholders will be key to the implementation of the initiatives and projects noted in this section?** *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)*

The Town of Berlin will be the lead agency in housing efforts. We will rely upon various federal and state funding agencies to assist us.

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## **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

### **E. Support transportation efficiency and access.**

**(1) What policies, strategies and projects are envisioned to strengthen the transportation network that affects the proposed SC Area? How will these initiatives support transportation choices (including walking, bicycling, bus or rail transit, and carpooling) or otherwise promote an efficient transportation network that integrates housing and transportation land uses? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

Our general goals for transportation are as follows:

- Connecting future land uses will have transportation development
- Encourage the use of alternative transportation, including improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities, encouraging the use of public transportation where available, and continuing to develop sidewalks.
- Find funding for roadway improvement, repair and construction
- Monitor the state highway needs inventory and county plans

The Comprehensive Plan notes that the town has an adequate number of arterials, collectors, and local streets. The plan also noted that an adequate number of ingress and egress points exist on Main St. and that any additional would detract from the character of the downtown as well as create additional congestion. The plan also notes that Berlin has four state highways that are important corridors. The plan strongly recommends that the town work with the State Highway Administration to implement any scenic corridor improvement that could be funded by the state. This would include the Streetscape Program.

It is our goal to have sidewalks on all streets which would eventually lead to the downtown, as well as street lighting where warranted.

The Comprehensive Plan suggests the construction of trails in order to reduce the amount of impervious surface. The Safe Routes to School program, administered by the State Highway Administration, is a potential funding source for this project. We are also seeking to develop bicycle paths.

In addition, we are developing a street master plan which will enable us to track and schedule repairs for certain streets which have not been addressed in some time.

**IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(2) If applicable, describe the SC Area's connection or proximity to transportation centers (e.g. Metro, MARC, and light rail stations) and describe opportunities for Transit - Oriented Development (TOD). Will Plan strategies and projects contribute to jobs/housing balance or otherwise provide a mix of land uses that can be expected to reduce reliance on single-occupancy automobiles? (If transit or TOD is not applicable in your community, all points in this section will be based on questions 1 and 3) *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)***

The Town is not close to transportation centers due to its location on the Lower Eastern Shore.

#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(3) Which community groups or stakeholders will be key to the implementation of the initiatives and projects noted in this section? *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)***

The transportation element of our SC Plan is a function of the Town government responsibilities.

## **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

### **F. Coordinating and Leveraging Policies and Investment**

**(1) What specific steps will the Sustainable Community Workgroup take to coordinate policies and funding streams to remove barriers to investment and maximize and increase funding in the proposed Sustainable Community Area? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The following steps will be taken by the Sustainable Community Workgroup in order to maximize and increase funding in the Sustainable Community area:

- Continue to aggressively seek grant funding from federal state and private sources. Our goal is to broaden and expand our grant seeking and not depend solely on Community Legacy/Sustainable Community funding. The town has already put a great emphasis on grant seeking, but we wish to make an even greater effort.
- Give thoughtful consideration to which projects would be best suited for Community Legacy/Sustainable Community funding and to apply each year when the funding opportunity comes open. We will endeavor to match as closely as possible our various projects with the funding sources which will be requested to provide grants.
- Develop our projects in such a way that they will be the most competitive when seeking grant funds. This attention to project design will consider a number of factors which will get the approval of the funding agencies. In many cases, choosing appropriate activities is a key to successful grant seeking. This will include evaluating alternative activities for their effectiveness, ability to meet the need, the ability to achieve goals and objectives, ease of evaluation, prospects for sustainability, and prospects for replication.
- Become more proactive than most communities by developing creative and successful methodologies to attract private investment and funding. This is an area which is often neglected by many local governments. However, we plan to seek foundation funding and find ways for local businesses to have an incentive to contribute to certain activities which have been sponsored by the town. This will allow us to make the best use of our resources.
- Develop additional innovative and enjoyable fee-based activities which can be attended by the citizens of Berlin.
- In order to develop more projects which are attractive to the private sector, it is necessary to utilize additional town funding. It will be our priority to look closely at our budget and our income stream in order to determine where we may contribute additional town funding. We fully realize that additional town funding will encourage more private development and will allow for a greater level of revitalization to take place.

In addition, it will be our policy to coordinate with our partners in order to ensure that private investment is encouraged. We will do our utmost to be business friendly. We will also work to ensure that all the various town departments act in concert with one another. It is our wish to avoid a situation where private investors receive conflicting information between departments. Our business-friendly policy will be enforced across the board.

**IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(2) How is the proposed Sustainable Community Plan consistent with other existing community or comprehensive plans?** *(Answer Space 4,000 characters)*

The Town's Comprehensive Plan was used extensively in the development of the Sustainable Communities Plan. In addition, the previous (2010) Community Legacy Plan was utilized to note accomplishments as well as projects which have not been completed. The previous CL plan is still an accurate depiction of the status and desired outcomes for the Berlin Sustainable Communities Plan.

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#### **IV. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**

**(3) How will the Plan help leverage and/or sustain more private sector investments? (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

All of the activities we have proposed under our Sustainable Communities Plan will have some impact on private investment. All of the housing, transportation, economic development, downtown revitalization and historic preservation activities contribute to the quality-of-life which is considered by prospective new businesses. In addition to the quality-of-life issue, however, most of those activities will directly spur private investment. An example of this would be the façade program and the revolving loan fund. These activities will directly assist business in locating and expanding in the town of Berlin. Proper maintenance of our infrastructure, such as sidewalks, streets, and water and sewer systems, speak directly to the needs of employers who may consider moving to Berlin. Without proper infrastructure, these companies would not be able to locate here.

Our downtown projects, such as façade improvements and the creation of additional events, will directly attract shoppers and visitors. Areas which present a deteriorated appearance do not attract shoppers. By addressing this element through our façade program and revolving loan fund, we will be adding considerably to the inventory of new businesses in the downtown.

We have a lot to “sell” in this area, including our town having been the location for two movies, the Runaway Bride and Tuck Everlasting. In addition, our unique New Year's Eve event, at which a large glass ball is dropped from a downtown building to simulate a Times Square celebration in New York, has become popular beyond our wildest expectations, with over 3000 people having celebrated in 2012.

The Town of Berlin has operated on the philosophy that a certain amount of public monies can leverage a great deal of private funding. We have been successful in attracting private funding due to the fact that we have been willing to find the funds in our budget to support Mr. Day's position. It has been our experience that this position brings in an amount of private investment far in excess of the amount spent on it. This has enabled us to be very creative with the incentives we can offer prospective new businesses. Due to this fact, we have developed a reputation as an extremely business friendly community. Our proactive stance in seeking grant funds for infrastructure improvements has convinced developers that we are serious about supporting them.

Our Enterprise Zone, which is centered primarily upon our Industrial Park, is another powerful tool for attracting private investment. This program offers a reduction in property tax for a period of 10 years as well as a substantial job creation tax credit. These benefits are substantial enough to give us a significant amount of new private investment.



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## **V. PROGRESS MEASURES**

**For the Plan parts of section IV (A through F):**

**(1) List the specific outcomes that the Plan seeks to produce. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The following are specific outcomes we expect to see as a result of the implementation of our Sustainable Communities Plan:

- Substantial increase in the number of visitors per year
- Provision of new jobs
- Attraction of new businesses to serve the visitors and residents
- Increase in the town's assessable base
- Increase in the town's median income
- Retention of businesses in the downtown area
- Improvement of the appearance of the downtown district
- Development of new community events and the support of existing ones
- Completion of needed sidewalk work
- Construction of walking trails
- Implementation of the recommendations in the town's Recreation Plan in order to make up a deficit of 27 acres of recreational areas
- Improvement in the appearance of older homes
- Improvement in the appeal of Berlin as a tourism and cultural center
- Well-maintained capital improvements

## **V. PROGRESS MEASURES**

**(2) And, list the specific benchmarks that will be used to measure progress toward these outcomes. (Answer Space 4,000 characters)**

The following are the benchmarks we are aiming for in the coming three-year period, in regard to those outcomes which can be measured.

- Substantial increase in the number of visitors per year- 5000 additional visitors
- Provision of new jobs- 100 new jobs
- Attraction of new businesses to serve the visitors and residents- 10 new businesses
- Increase in the town's assessable base- 10% increase
- Increase in the town's median income- 15% increase
- Retention of businesses in the downtown area- all current businesses will stay
- Improvement of the appearance of the downtown district- this is somewhat subjective, but can be measured by a survey by our Code Enforcement Officer which shows a decrease in the number of citations
- Development of new community events and the support of existing ones- 3 additional events per year
- Completion of needed sidewalk work- all existing sidewalks in need of repair are fixed and new sidewalks are installed in areas noted by the Comprehensive Plan
- Construction of walking trails- 3 miles of trails constructed
- Implementation of the recommendations in the Town's Recreation Plan in order to make up a deficit of 27 acres of recreational areas- elimination of deficit in acreage
- Improvement of the appearance of older homes- all older homes will be in good repair
- Improvement in the appeal of Berlin as a tourism and cultural center- additional visitors as noted above
- Well-maintained capital improvements- completion of all capital improvement projects noted in the Comprehensive Plan

**REPLACE THIS PAGE WITH**  
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**  
**RESOLUTIONS**

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**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY APPLICATION  
DISCLOSURE AUTHORIZATION AND CERTIFICATION**

The undersigned authorizes the Department of Housing and Community Development (the "Department") to make such inquiries as necessary, including, but not limited to, credit inquiries, in order to verify the accuracy of the statements made by the applicant and to determine the creditworthiness of the applicant.

In accordance with Executive Order 01.01.1983.18, the Department advises you that certain personal information is necessary to determine your eligibility for financial assistance. Availability of this information for public inspection is governed by Maryland's Access to Public Records Act, State Government Article, Section 10-611 et seq. of the Annotated Code of Maryland (the "Act"). This information will be disclosed to appropriate staff of the Department or to public officials for purposes directly connected with administration of this financial assistance program for which its use is intended. Such information may be shared with State, federal or local government agencies, which have a financial role in the project. You have the right to inspect, amend, or correct personal records in accordance with the Act.

The Department intends to make available to the public certain information regarding projects recommended for funding in the Sustainable Community Plan. The information available to the public will include the information in this application, as may be supplemented or amended. This information may be confidential under the Act. If you consider this information confidential and do not want it made available to the public, please indicate that in writing and attach the same to this application.

You agree that not attaching an objection constitutes your consent to the information being made available to the public and a waiver of any rights you may have regarding this information under the Act.

**I have read and understand the above paragraph. Applicant's Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_

Anyone who knowingly makes, or causes to be made, any false statement or report relative to this financial assistance application, for the purposes of influencing the action of the Department on such application, is subject to immediate cancellation of financial assistance and other penalties authorized by law.

The undersigned hereby certifies that the Sustainable Communities Plan or Project(s) proposed in this Application can be accomplished and further certifies that the information set herein and in any attachment in support hereof is true, correct, and complete to the best of his/her knowledge and belief.

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Authorized Signature

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Print Name and Title

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Date